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Connecting the Mekong through Education and Training

Quarterly Report

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Contract Number: AID-486-C-14-00001

Activity Start Date and End Date: October 6, 2014 to October 5, 2019

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ACRONYMS

AEC	ASEAN Economic Community
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
COEs	Centers of Excellence
COMET	Connecting the Mekong through Education and Training
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
EDC	Education Development Center, Inc.
GDA	Global Development Alliance
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HP	Hewlett Packard
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IPSR	Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University
LM	Lower Mekong
LMI	Lower Mekong Initiative
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NGO	Non-governmental Organizations
NI	National Instruments
PMEP	Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Plan
PPP	Public Private Partnerships
SIIT	Sirindhorn International Institute of Technology, Thammasat University
STEM+AT	Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, Accounting, and Tourism
TVET	Technical Vocational Education and Training
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WRN!	Work Ready Now!

PROGRAM OVERVIEW/SUMMARY

Program Name:	Connecting the Mekong through Education and Training
Activity Start Date And End Date:	October 6, 2014 to October 5, 2019
Name of Prime Implementing Partner:	Education Development Center, Inc.
Contract Number:	AID-486-C-14-00001
Name of Subcontractors:	Mahidol University, Institute for Population and Social Research
Major Counterpart Organizations	Ministries of Education and Labor in Lower Mekong countries, universities, vocational training institutes, private sector partners.
Geographic Coverage (cities and or countries)	Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam
Reporting Period:	October 6, 2014 to January 6, 2015

I.1 Program Description/Introduction

The goal of the USAID ‘Connecting the Mekong through Education and Training’ (COMET) Project is to help universities and vocational centers to increase the number of skilled workers in science, technology, engineering, mathematics, accounting, and tourism (STEM+AT) fields in the Lower Mekong countries (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam).

COMET will bring together public and private sector partners and use information technology to deliver accessible training in key sectors. The contract is managed by the USAID Regional Development Mission for Asia (RDMA) and implemented by the Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC).

The ultimate objective of COMET is to improve economic integration and global competitiveness through human resource development in the Lower Mekong sub-region. Through bringing technology and online resources to vocational and higher education institutions and learners, the project will seek to improve skills of young people in the Lower Mekong sub-region in STEM+AT. COMET will connect large-scale multi-national and national firms with vocational centers and higher education institution and other local stakeholders, to bring in the demand-driven skills and competencies.

Regional Integration

COMET is designed to accelerate the integration of the ‘ASEAN Community’ through addressing goals outlined by the Initiative for ASEAN Integration. In addition, COMET directly supports the strategy under the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity to enhance the free flow of intra-ASEAN skilled labor, which in turn will promote deeper intra-ASEAN social and cultural interaction and increase regional linkages among the skilled workers in the Lower Mekong sub-region.

COMET will carry out consolidated trainings and customized courses for the least developed ASEAN Member States. COMET-organized trainings will provide a platform for individuals from the various Lower Mekong countries working in a specific subject area or profession to interact with one another. This interaction between peers will consequently facilitate new connections, exchange of ideas and information, and support mechanisms that can be sustained and strengthened through available technology like social media platforms. In this way, COMET will improve people-to-people connectivity across the Lower Mekong, and cultivate many formal and informal networks that will collectively contribute to regional integration across ASEAN.

Leveraging Innovative and Evidence-based Education Solutions

As the Lower Mekong nations are all facing similar challenges in developing their current and upcoming skilled workforce in STEM+AT, COMET will take advantage of the new “revolution” in higher education offered by online training, mobile technology, and educational courses and engage workers in all the Lower Mekong countries in targeted, sub-regional trainings. COMET will share best practices to promote transformational change and uptake by stakeholders.

By adopting innovative technologies under COMET, educational providers in the Lower Mekong sub-region will:

- Transform the classroom from a place where lectures are delivered to one where teachers and students have lively discussions about the online lectures and material;
- Promote the exchange of information, knowledge and ideas;
- Establish new formal and informal professional sub-regional networks;
- Widen the reach of post-secondary education and training to rural and remote areas in the Mekong sub-region.

Coupling technological breakthroughs with standardized curriculums in STEM+AT will help spread consistent instruction at a relative modest cost per student to the education providers in the sub-region.

Building upon these foundations, COMET seeks to engage with higher education and vocational institutions in the Lower Mekong sub-region that have the capacity to absorb technical assistance to deliver sub-regional trainings and courses in STEM+AT. COMET will then identify potential sub-regional centers of excellence (or technical hubs) that can deliver education and training over the long-term in order to sustain the growth in skilled human resources in STEM+AT and enhanced people-to-people connectivity in ASEAN.

I.2 Summary of Results to Date

NOT APPLICABLE - THIS IS THE PROJECT'S FIRST QUARTERLY REPORT SUBMISSION. TABLE TO FOLLOW IN THE SUBSEQUENT QUARTERLY REPORTS THAT LISTS RESULTS AND PROGRESS MEASURED AGAINST STANDARD INDICATORS.

2. ACTIVITY IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS

2.1 Progress Narrative: Component 1, Curriculum Development and Skilled Workforce

Component One is intended to support the other two components under the project by strengthening online information sharing, research and data management, and job forecasting in order to collectively support institutional capacity development and the strengthening of networks of education providers in the Lower Mekong (LM) sub-region.

Baseline Regional Assessment

As a first and fundamental step towards achieving its objectives, COMET is carrying out a regional baseline STEM+AT Labor Market Assessment (Baseline Assessment) to identify specific industries, jobs and skills in high-demand in STEM+AT fields in the LM sub-region, through consultations with leading industries.

The Baseline Assessment explores in particular two over-arching questions:

1. What is the current state of the STEM+AT field in the Lower Mekong sub-region? As part of addressing this question, this assessment identifies the main STEM+AT industries within each country; looks at each industry's pattern of growth over the past five years in terms of hiring; and explores the sources of innovation and growth for these industries.
2. What are the main challenges with regard to the workforce that companies currently face in the five Lower Mekong countries, particularly as relates to STEM+AT? As part of addressing this question, the Baseline Assessment explores the industry- or country-specific challenges that companies face; identifies how employers characterize the skill level of their current and incoming workforce; and investigates dominant hiring strategies that employers use.

There are two components to this research: a desk review and primary data collection. The final paper, due to USAID on February 27, 2015 will combine these components. The final paper is expected to reflect: 1) survey data from stakeholders (approximately 20%); 2) key informant interviews with employers, schools, and officials within ministries of labor and education in the target countries (20%); and 3) youth focus groups (20%) so that youth play a critical role in identifying their target industries and the skills they most feel they must learn to be competitive in the Lower Mekong marketplace, with data analysis and desk research contributing approximately 40% to the final paper.

The COMET team submitted a draft baseline assessment to USAID on January 5, 2015, which primarily consisted of desk research as well as preliminary results from initial surveys conducted of employers in Thailand.

Desk Research

For the desk research, the COMET team reviewed academic papers, documents from multilateral or bilateral organizations active in the LM region (such as the Asian Development Bank or USAID), project documents and reports produced by local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as well as data and policy documents published by host country governments. These documents were reviewed for information pertaining to:

- Regional and country specific key sectors, growth projections for sectors, and policy documents related to government planning within the next twenty years within relevant industry clusters;
- Regional and country specific information on labor market trends such as employment, labor market participation, and regional labor migration patterns;
- Mismatches between the demand and supply of specific, STEM+AT relevant labor market skills as well as information regarding “foundational” skill preparedness such as literacy; and
- Demographic information including population distributions, changes in poverty rates, changes in GDP, and changes in countries’ sector mixes.

Primary Data Collection

On December 8, a subcontract between Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC) and the Institute for Population and Social Research (IPSR) at Mahidol University in Thailand was fully executed for IPSR to develop and carry out the primary data collection and analysis for all COMET project countries. IPSR is carrying out primary data collection for COMET in Thailand, and will work with country-based consultant teams in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam to conduct primary data collection in their respective countries.

To develop the primary data collection tools and instruments needed for the baseline study, a two-day design workshop was conducted by IPSR from December 11 – 12, 2014. The tools developed from the workshop were first tested and refined in Thailand and will be used for the data collectors training workshop to be held January 8 – 9, 2015 at Mahidol University. During this workshop, country-based data collectors from Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam will travel to Bangkok to be trained by IPSR on the primary data collection tools, methodology, and data synthesis and reporting process.

Quantitative and qualitative data tools were drafted as outputs of the initial design workshop. Quantitative data tools include: 1) an employer survey, and 2) a vocational training and educational institution survey. The employer survey, which will be instrumental for future job forecasting, focuses on current and future hiring patterns, current and projected employee profiles, desired workplace skills, and internet connectivity and use in the workplace. All quantitative data surveys are administered as telephone interviews in local language, following protocols and scripted guidelines drafted by COMET in consultation with IPSR. Qualitative data surveys are being administered in local language, and inputted in SurveyMonkey in English.

Qualitative data is collected through key informant interviews with relevant stakeholders including employers of identified growth sectors, education administrators, and government officials. Additionally, focus group discussions with youth are conducted to determine desired career paths, perceived skills gaps or mismatches, and youth opinions on attainability of jobs. Field notes summaries will be written for each interview and focus group conducted and then analyses in a 3-page report for each LM country. Quantitative data collected is inputted in SurveyMonkey in English to be analyzed by EDC's Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) team.

The sampling frame for the primary data collection of the Regional Baseline Analysis is illustrated in the following table:

Primary Data Collection Tool	Sampling Frame (for all LM countries)
<i>Quantitative Data Tool</i>	
Employer and Educational Institution Survey	60 completed surveys
<i>Qualitative Data Tool</i>	
Key Informant Interviews (Employers, Educational Institutions, Government)	60 completed interviews
Youth Focus Group Discussions (Students)	25 conducted focus groups

All quantitative assessment data will be analyzed using standard statistical methods. Data will be disaggregated by country and industry, as appropriate. Frequencies and cross-tabulations will be performed for the analysis of categorical data. Central tendency analysis (e.g. mean, median) will be conducted for continuous variables (such as the number of employees). Multivariate analyses will be used to determine relationships between variables.

Web Portal Development

Initial discussions surrounding website and portal development occurred in November, during the COMET mobilization period. These conversations focused on avenues for portal development, including the potential for a 3rd party to host the website, integration of Facebook and twitter, and the potential for COMET to take ownership of the Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI) Facebook page. The resolution from these initial discussions is that EDC will host the initial platform through the development of a robust architecture, and then plan for a period of capacity building at the ultimate host entity before responsibility for the portal is transferred. In addition, EDC is anticipating that the COMET project will be transferred ownership of the LMI Facebook page, although a specific date or details have not yet been determined. The anticipated portal url is: LowerMekongSkills2Work.

Starting in January, 2015, COMET has launched a series of implementation discussions with our Web Development Team and EDC's Chief Technology Officer, Bob Spielvogel. These include a rough outline of the portal layout and links to embedded M&E systems. Bob Spielvogel is planning to arrive in Bangkok, Thailand on January 18, 2015, and will spearhead efforts to develop a wireframe and portal outline with Bangkok staff, USAID and others who can inform

the design and implementation plan for the COMET online presence (social media, website and portal).

Once the website is launched on April 6, 2015, COMET intends to use both the website and social media sites to promote the project and provide greater access to its resources developed. Social Media sites may begin operation prior to the website launch date, in order to build an audience for the website launch. The anticipated timeline includes:

- Post daily tweet on project twitter feed – beginning in March 2015, and continuing for the rest of the quarter
- Take over Lower Mekong Facebook account – March 2015
- Revise page name and page content to transition to COMET focus – March to May 2015
- Post daily updates to Facebook page - beginning in March 2015, and continuing for the rest of the quarter

2.2 Implementation Status: Component I, Curriculum Development and Skilled Workforce

Preliminary Result: Baseline Regional Assessment

Please refer to Section 2.1 above regarding the Baseline Regional Assessment.

Preliminary Result: Web Portal Development

Web portal development is proceeding on schedule, with the majority of portal development activities expected in Q2, 2015.

2.3 Implementation Challenges: Component I, Curriculum Development and Skilled Workforce

EDC worked diligently with IPSR to help them improve their range of tools used for the Baseline Assessment. This included guidance in the development of 6 tools, 3 procedures, and a glossary reference document for data collectors to use during the baseline. The development of the tools went through a series of revisions based on actual input from both COMET and IPSR technical staff from a 2 day workshop in mid December 2014. Inputs were also considered from the pilot that had been conducted in the same month. The tools will be introduced to data collectors during a training workshop to be held from January 11 – 12, 2015 during which data collectors will be able to practice using the tools and have the opportunity to provide feedback and revise as necessary.

2.4 PMP Update: Component I, Curriculum Development and Skilled Workforce

There are three main functions in COMET's M&E program: (1) Baseline assessment of participating institutions; (2) continuous performance monitoring; and (3) An impact evaluation. For the first quarter, M&E efforts have focused on the the baseline assessment. This is relevant to indicator: "Skilled and targeted labor gaps in baseline analysis are narrowed by the end of the activity". In consultation with the Country Activities Coordinator and the Director of EDC's Monitoring, Evaluation and Research team, the Monitoring and Evaluation Manager reviewed development of the baseline tools, procedures and instruments for data collection, and ensured that proper systems were in place and appropriate for the baseline survey and interviews. EDC is providing ongoing technical support to IPSR on the development of tools and will continue to do so during the primary data collection period. The M&E team will analyze the collected data as they are submitted to the team. The findings from the study will shape the Baseline Regional Assessment and feed into subsequent job forecasting reports for the STEM+AT sectors.

In addition to the baseline study, the M&E department received feedback from USAID on the Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Plan (PMEP). The PMEP is currently being revised and adjusted in accordance to the suggestions and inputs from USAID. The team aims to discuss the second draft of the M&E Plan with USAID in late Jan 2015.

The Director of EDC's Monitoring, Evaluation and Research Team traveled to Bangkok on January 5 and will visit until January 23 to assist COMET with M&E activities (including the revision of the PMEP and the baseline exercise) and provide an orientation to the field team in EDC policies and procedures regarding M&E systems.

2.5 Progress Narrative: Component II, Training Today's Workforce

Component II Overview

The goal of Component Two is to provide vocational training to the current workforce in priority areas. COMET will work with a group of higher education and TVET institutions in

each country to prepare and implement supplemental curricula based on the skill gaps and key sectors identified by the Baseline Analysis. The partner institutions will work closely with local businesses to enhance the supplemental curricula with local employers skill requirements, provide learning experiences for students with the local employers, and provide a closer link with the work environment as a part of the training process.

Core technical activities under Component 2 include the following:

- Selection of vocational schools.
- Development and delivery of Master Trainer modules
- Follow-up training to ensure uptake of both pedagogy and curriculum content in the network of Master Trainers

Key deliverables under Component 2 include:

- Identification and selection of vocational schools
- Delivery of training to Master Trainers (and through them, vocational schools and centers)
- Follow-up support to Master Trainers

Progress Narrative – Component II

At the end of November, 2014, the project met with the Director of Cisco Systems Social Innovation Group, Asia Pacific to begin developing partnerships in support of Component Two and to become better informed regarding the Cisco Network Academy program, Cisco's flagship corporate social responsibility (CSR) program. Through this program Cisco has established 9,000 academies in 170 countries, and trained more than 1 million students worldwide. "Networking Academy helps individuals prepare for industry-recognized certifications and entry-level information and communication technology (ICT) careers in virtually every type of industry. Students develop foundational skills in ICT while acquiring vital 21st-century career skills in problem solving, collaboration, and critical thinking." (<https://www.netacad.com/web/about-us/about-networking-academy>).

The project described its innovative approach to improving instruction. Cisco was interested in the project's approach especially the closing of skill gaps, using a blended learning approach to provide more imaginative instruction, and the strengthening of links with local businesses, and involving them in the instructional process. Cisco cited their experience with vocational training through the Cisco Network Academy program.

The results of the discussion provided several possibilities for Cisco to collaborate with the project. Cisco offered to:

- Provide inputs to the baseline study;
- Share their CSR experiences and successes with the project;
- Provide candidates for project Centers of Excellence; and
- Host a briefing with Cisco Academies in the sub-region using Cisco TV, an in-house, IP-based television system. A session with selected institutions in the partner countries was arranged for mid-December

On December 18, 2014, COMET gave a project briefing to approximately 40 Cisco Academy instructors from Vietnam, Cambodia, Myanmar and Thailand. The briefing was conducted over Cisco Systems (Thailand) Limited WebEX online meeting system. The briefing was a success with many participants showing interest in joining the project. The project and Cisco agreed to build on this initial partnering activity by seeking other collaborative opportunities.

2.6 Implementation Status: Component II, Training Today's Workforce

Baseline data for the outcome indicator “Number of trainees hired in appropriate jobs in STEM+AT fields” will be collected later in Year 1. More information on the M&E department's support for the currently baseline assessment of skill gaps is described in Component I. Other indicators currently have targets set starting in Year 2.

2.7 Implementation Challenges: Component II, Training Today's Workforce

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2.8 Progress Narrative: Component III, Developing Tomorrow's Leaders

Component III Overview

Under Component Three, the focus is placed on developing the leadership capacity of higher education institutions and key TVET institutions in the Lower Mekong sub-region. COMET anticipates designating one higher education institution and up to two TVET institutions in each country as Centers of Excellence (COEs). The COEs will be responsible for keeping the supplemental curriculum up-to-date, keeping blended learning components current and relevant, disseminating training to new institutions and instructors, linking with local and multinational businesses, and carrying the responsibility for project best practices' sustainability beyond the life of the project.

Core technical activities under Component 3 include the following:

- Selection of COEs and the creation of a community of practice for COEs to share best practices in blended learning and other COMET activities with one another through sub-regional partnerships network.
- Development and delivery of Master Trainer modules
- Follow-up training to ensure uptake of both pedagogy and curriculum content in the network of Master Trainers

Key deliverables under Component 3 include:

- Selection of COEs and the development of a regional network to promote partnerships
- Development and delivery of Master Trainer modules
- Follow-up training to ensure uptake of both pedagogy and curriculum content in the network of Master Trainers

Progress Narrative – Component III

Technology Pilot Initiative

By the end of March 2015, COMET will engage from 10-15 instructors and up to 20 students to conduct a three-day training pilot initiative using technology tools that will serve as a model for future COMET training activities. The pilot will cover two and a half days of teacher training and practice and one half day of live simulation activities with students and businesses. Following COMET's proposed training methodology, COMET will provide post-training mentoring support for the instructors, additional interactive activities for the students and the business partner, and continuing support for the linkage between the host institution and the collaborating business. This approach effectively models a learning environment that leverages existing online and classroom learning content (i.e., blended learning), appeals to students and teachers, and serves to invigorate private sector involvement in student learning and workforce preparation.

Since this is a pilot activity designed to help assess the viability of COMET's training methodology, a formative evaluation protocol will be conducted in parallel with the implementation of the pilot activities. The evaluation will provide inputs on the effectiveness of using existing curricula that has been enhanced with blended learning components, the impact of simulations, role plays and other active learning methodologies, the role of instructional partners, the value of the linkage with a local business, and possibilities for scalability and sustainability.

The COMET Instructor Training Pilot will focus on content that cuts across STEM+AT sectors in preparing students for jobs. 21st century work readiness skills such as effective teamwork, communications, and leadership skills will be developed into COMET's early blended-learning modules for higher education teachers to integrate into and supplement existing curricula including selections from HP LIFE e-Learning and Work Ready Now!

Additional modules covering both 21st century work readiness skills and STEM+AT technical skills will be developed after the pilot and will be informed by the three-day teaching and learning experience. All COMET modules will engage students through interactive face-to-face learning, including discussions and group activities, and virtual learning through online courses and technology simulations. COMET will then look to build on the initial three-day pilot with longer-term activities such as ongoing mentoring of instructors, work-based learning, and continuing collaboration with the collaborating business.

2.9 Implementation Status: Component III, Developing Tomorrow's Leaders

On January 7, COMET's Bangkok staff are scheduled to engage EDC's Washington DC-based Instructional Designer/Curriculum Specialist to begin development of the COMET training model and teaching and learning materials for the Instructor Training Pilot and future training activities.

The initial design of the pilot is detailed in the COMET Instructor Training Pilot Document (See Annex B), which includes an overview of one potential pilot module on "Effective Leadership." Starting in January and leading up to the pilot date, the instructional design team will map additional content from HP LIFE e-Learning and Work Ready Now! (WRN!) to develop further modules that fit COMET's blended and active learning approach as well as aim to connect students with employers via technology in classroom learning.

Additional preparation for the pilot includes the identification and selection of a partner university host. The first meeting with a potential university partner, Sirindhorn International Institute of Technology (SIIT) at Thammasat University, was held on December 12 along with USAID representatives. Details from this meeting are included in Section 4: Stakeholder Participation and Involvement. COMET and SIIT have continued dialogue on their potential candidacy to host the pilot. Two additional universities have been identified and contacted. On January 15, COMET's Deputy Chief of Party for Programs and COMET's Country Activities Coordinator will meet with Mr. Worawit Israngkul na Ayudhya, Dean of the Faculty of Engineering at Mahidol University to discuss the pilot initiative. Lastly, COMET has contacted Dr. Montien Chomdokmai, Director of International Graduate Studies Human Resource Development Center, Faculty of Education at Burapha University to schedule a meeting to discuss their potential involvement in the COMET pilot.

Once the university partner is selected to host the pilot, EDC will identify potential business partners to participate in the live simulation activities with students during the COMET Instructor Training Pilot.

2.10 Implementation Challenges: Component III, Developing Tomorrow's Leaders

The first challenge of the COMET Instructor Training Pilot relates to the time required to identify and select a qualified and interested university partner. A series of meetings and regular communication is required to ensure that both COMET and the university partner understand

the pilot activities, event preparation, and partnership roles and responsibilities. Anticipating the need for early and continued engagement, COMET began reaching out to potential universities in early December 2014. As of Mid-January, three potential universities are being considered: SIIT, Mahidol University, and Burapha University.

An additional challenge with universities that have been contacted is establishing and maintaining common expectations around the partnership. For example, SIIT has informed COMET that teacher honoraria would need to be provided at 2,000 Baht/hour per teacher to participate in the pilot initiative despite being cost-prohibitive for the project. This issue will be addressed with clearer communication around partnership expectations and benefits for the university.

Finally, scheduling of the pilot initiative can only be determined once a university partner is selected. While EDC will aim to conduct the pilot in March, several factors will need to be taken in consideration including: availability of teachers, students, and the training venue, school academic calendar, etc.

2.1 I PMP Update: Component III, Developing Tomorrow's Leaders

Baseline data for the outcome indicator “Number of trainees hired in appropriate jobs in STEM+AT fields” will be collected later in Year 1. More information on the M&E department's support for the currently baseline assessment of skill gaps is described in Component I. Other indicators currently have targets set starting in Year 2.

3. INTEGRATION OF CROSSCUTTING ISSUES AND USAID FORWARD PRIORITIES

3.1 Gender Equality and Female Empowerment

The COMET project intends to address gender equality and female empowerment through project activities, by providing mechanisms to boost female participation in e-Learning or face-to-face training in STEM+AT in the Lower Mekong. However, the particular strategies to be implemented by the project will depend on the outcome of the Regional Baseline Assessment. The assessment is expected to provide information on skills gaps and industry/labor market participation by gender. An Institutional Capacity Baseline Assessment, to follow, will also provide supplemental information on female enrollment rates in regional universities, by area of STEM+AT focus.

3.2 Sustainability Mechanisms

The portal – and its associated functions of providing updated labor market information to jobseekers and facilitating regional Public Private Partnerships and institutional networks, is designed to be sustainable. Through the selection of Centers of Excellence, COMET will identify candidate institutions capable of taking ownership of the portal within Year 5 of the project. The project will then provide on-going capacity building to enable the institution to learn the necessary Information Technology, Labor Market Forecasting, and/or other skills needed to maintain the portal.

In order to boost the sustainability of the portal, efforts will be made to define and explore the potential for creating a tiered service model for the portal, providing free access to jobseekers but potentially requiring a subscription fee from businesses seeking to hire through the portal or universities interested in participation. Fees would be intended to support the local host institution in an on-going manner, to fund portal maintenance as well as updated labor market surveys.

3.3 Environmental Compliance

In accordance with clause H.15 of the COMET contract, EDC does not anticipate any ongoing or planned activities that would impact environmental compliance.

3.4 Local Capacity Development

IPSR is a research institute based in Thailand that conducts research specialized in population and development relevant to social, economic, reproductive health, and medical and public health fields. To collaborate effectively with IPSR to conduct research on labor market forecasting, the COMET team briefed IPSR on issues related to the current context in the region on education, skills developed in schools (supply), skills required from employers (demand), and the capacity of educational institution in the region. In addition, as labor market analyses are a new focus area for IPSR, the COMET team worked closely with IPSR during the initial development of tools, adjusting the tools after the pilot, and will provide technical support during the workshop for data collectors in January 2015. Throughout this process, COMET ensured that the Employer Survey and the School Survey were in-line with the required data needed for the baseline. In addition, COMET supported IPSR in developing the In-depth Interview guidelines for teachers, employers, and government officials, as well as the development of the Student Focus Group Discussion procedures for the data collectors.

COMET has built the capacity of IPSR in the following ways:

- Review and finalization of data collection tools;
- Provision of data collection protocols;
- Desk research and producing the baseline report;
- Active participation in two data collection tools workshops (discussion, technical advice, etc.)

- Training/practice on data entry using online survey software (SurveyMonkey)
- Understanding of USAID guidelines and protocols

3.5 Public Private Partnership (PPP) and Global Development Alliance (GDA) Impacts

NOT APPLICABLE - THIS IS THE PROJECT'S FIRST QUARTERLY REPORT SUBMISSION

3.6 Science, Technology, and Innovation Impacts

The key to COMET's success will be to leverage support from the private sector. Therefore, the project aims to bring together a coalition of private sector technology partners, businesses active in key STEM+AT industries, and higher education centers of excellence to test, implement, and promote innovative approaches and technology applications and content to expanding skills in the Lower Mekong region. It is through this coalition that COMET expects to make significant impacts on innovation in STEM+AT training throughout the region.

Innovation

COMET will establish an interactive portal to provide real-time content to learners/job seekers, employers, and universities and training institutions. The online project presence and the portal are dependent upon support and linkages existing content, expertise and technology. Portal innovations will depend on collaboration with cutting-edge technology partners. The project is already working with Google, Intel, Hewlett- Packard (HP), and Cisco Systems. More will be added as the project expands.

Beyond support for the portal, the project is seeking partners in mobile technology, online learning, and/or who have expertise in technical skills areas (such as electronics, automotive manufacturing, health sciences) to develop solutions to catalyze job growth in high demand industries in the sub-region.

In addition, the project is launching, by the end of March 2015, a Technology Pilot to test innovative models for using technology to actively engage employers in classroom training (See Annex B for more detail). Following COMET's proposed training methodology, COMET will provide post-training mentoring support for the instructors, additional interactive activities for the students and the business partner, and continuing support for the linkage between the host institution and the collaborating business. This approach effectively models a learning environment that leverages existing online and classroom learning content (i.e., blended learning), appeals to students and teachers, and serves to invigorate private sector involvement in student learning and workforce preparation.

Science and Technology

COMET is focusing on key skill areas including science, technology, engineering, mathematics,

accounting and tourism, also known as STEM+AT. Preliminary results of COMET's baseline regional analysis have identified key sectors, both regionally and for each of COMET's participating countries. As COMET progresses, specific career pathways and related skills sets within each key industry will become areas of focus for the portal and blended learning curricula.

Key sectors and industries across the region include accounting, tourism, agriculture/aquaculture, automotive manufacturing and assembly, and electronics. Within each country, the key sectors and industries identified include:

- Cambodia: Light manufacturing and automotive parts production
- Lao PDR: Garment and textile manufacturing
- Myanmar: Real estate/construction and telecommunications
- Thailand: High value-added electronics, medical device manufacturing, and food processing
- Vietnam: Chemicals, real estate/construction, information technology, and ship building

Connectivity and English

COMET relies heavily upon information technology to bring online content and information to the workforce. COMET's web portal will use low bandwidth technologies to maximize user accessibility. However, a threshold level of connectivity may be necessary for users to benefit from these online resources. Additionally, COMET will seek innovative solutions such as the use of mobile technologies or special partnerships with technology providers to solve connectivity issues. COMET is working with the Lower Mekong Sub-region where each participating country has its own national language. Since COMET is working to strengthen participation in the ASEAN Economic Community, English is the project's working language to support this convention. As with the bandwidth issue, COMET will work with its partners to find cost-effective ways to overcome language barriers including leveraging locally produced content whenever possible. While language and connectivity challenges may limit participation in COMET activities, this approach will allow the project to concentrate on building the capacity of particular education institutions to be regional centers of excellence. These centers could then help other institutions take advantage of the resources and training provided under COMET.

4. STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION AND INVOLVEMENT

The successful implementation of COMET will largely depend on the facilitation of innovative and interesting partnerships between the governments, the private sector, civil society, donors, educational institutions and multi-lateral organization in order to secure workforce education and training in the Lower Mekong sub-region. COMET will leverage partnerships with the private sector for access to:

- Workshop trainers; curriculum development initiatives;

- Free or low-cost software applications;
- Outreach to incorporate gender equality into the work place;
- Community outreach to promote the application of ICT for online learning; and
- Financial assistance including in-kind technical assistance.

This approach will strengthen the relationships between interested employers and education providers, which in turn will help close the gap between the demand and supply in skilled human resources in the Lower Mekong sub-region. The section below details private sector partnerships being developed for current and future work on COMET.

Baseline Regional Analysis Partnerships

IPSR (COMET's Partner on the Baseline Regional Analysis):

On January 5, 2015, COMET submitted to USAID the draft IPSR-EDC Baseline Regional Analysis which will be refined using primary data collected from all five LM countries and then submitted to USAID on February 27, 2015.

Hewlett-Packard

COMET is working closely with HP to integrate selected content from the HP Life e-learning courses into the project's Instructor Training Pilot. A one-page partnership document, "USAID – HP Partnership Opportunity: Joining the USAID COMET Consortium" was shared with all HP contacts in late December for their review and feedback. COMET continues to discuss additional collaborative activities with HP.

Google

Google will collaborate with COMET in partial fulfillment of their multimillion dollar MOU with USAID. Google and the project have identified the Instructor Training Pilot as the starting point for this collaboration. Google will provide the services of a Google Apps specialist to guide and support the Google Apps component of the Pilot training. Also, the Google specialist will implement a formative evaluation of the Google Apps component of the Pilot.

The Google Emerging Markets Manager for Asia Pacific joined the COMET Roadshow visits to Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. Google found the roadshow very informative and was able to get a better understanding of how the development process works. This should make it easier for Google to support the COMET pilot and define future Google/COMET collaboration.

Intel

Several meetings were held during the quarter between USAID, Intel, and COMET. These discussions began the process of defining the scope and purpose of Intel's collaboration with the project. By next quarter, COMET hopes that Intel's contributions will be finalized.

Cisco Systems

Cisco Systems Social Innovation Group, Asia Pacific met with the project midway through the quarter to explore collaborative possibilities. Cisco's long and varied experience in supporting education/training and philanthropic social programs gives Cisco a maturity working with donors and projects that is extraordinary. The discussions with Cisco have been focused and in-depth. Cisco offered to provide inputs to the baseline study, share their experiences and successes with the project, offer possibilities for COEs, etc. In turn, Cisco showed keen interest in the project's approach to the pilot because of its own difficulties with unimaginative instruction, poor links with employers and students graduating with strong technical skills, but lacking 21st Century skills.

Cisco hosted a briefing with educational institutions in the sub-region using Cisco TV. Cisco invited 40 Cisco Academies from the five project countries to join the briefing. On December 18, 2014 the USAID COR the COMET COP, and the COMET Country Activities Coordinator gave a project briefing to approximately 40 instructors from Vietnam, Cambodia, Myanmar and Thailand. The briefing was conducted over Cisco Systems (Thailand) Limited WebEX online meeting system. Cisco's Director, Social Innovations Group, Asia Pacific, arranged the meeting. The key purpose of the meeting was to introduce the USAID COMET initiative being implemented by EDC to Cisco Academies in the Lower Mekong sub-region. The briefing was a success with many participants showing interest in joining the project.

Sirindhorn International Institute of Technology (SIIT), Thammasat University

USAID and the COMET Chief of Party met with Sirindhorn International Institute of Technology, Thammasat University, on Friday, December 12. The The Director of the Institute, Professor Somnuk Tangtermsirikul (D.Eng.), hosted the meeting. The following topics were discussed:

- The purpose of COMET and how COMET was designed to assist the LM sub-region be successful in the AEC
- The three components and a discussion of the role of universities and COEs
- The grants program
- The online presence, role of social media, and the portal
- COE/university leadership for the expansion and sustainability of COMET successes
- Instructor Training Pilot concept and implementation plan
- Purpose of the pilot
- The role of the host institution, Google, and the collaborating local business
- Walkthrough of the process and follow-up
- SIIT hosting of the pilot
- Advantages of SIIT hosting-a key STEM institution, not too large, strong links to multiple local businesses, English speaking faculty
- What does SIIT gain from hosting-experience with COMET, familiarization with the COMET training model, possible selection as a COMET COE with a grant, leadership role in COMET and beyond, USAID added the possibility of a direct grant with SIIT for future non-COMET related activities
- Q&A on hosting
- Follow-up visit-SIIT will discuss their possible hosting of the pilot with the faculty, and advise the project. The project will follow-up with them next week.

SIIT requested a follow-up meeting to discuss the details of collaboration with the project. A meeting is planned for January 26.

National Instruments (NI)

A teleconference with National Instruments was scheduled for December 19; a follow-up meeting between the COMET Chief of Party and NI will take place on January 12 in Singapore to discuss further opportunities

Institute of Technical Education East Singapore

Institute of Technical Education (ITE) East, Singapore, has contacted the COP and will arrange a meeting while the COP is in Singapore in early January 2015.

Asia Institute of Technology Consulting

The project requested a meeting with Asia Institute of Technology Consulting at the request of USAID. This meeting has been requested and confirmed for January 19, 2015.

5. MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

Startup and Mobilization

Drawing on its rich experience in successfully starting-up numerous projects across the globe, EDC established a COMET start-up taskforce that utilized a task tracking system to efficiently manage all of the elements crucial to establishing a strong project foundation. The taskforce comprised EDC staff from across a variety of departments including legal, technical, human resources, contracts, operations, information technology, security, and communications. The taskforce met on a regular basis to monitor the progress of all tasks in close coordination with the field staff. On October 6, 2014, the first day of the contract, two EDC staff were in place and began efforts to initiate start-up tasks from the EDC Bangkok office focused on logistics and operations as well as technical and programmatic tasks.

A 90-day mobilization plan along with a narrative was developed to provide an overview of the human resource coverage to be provided by EDC home office and field staff and provided to USAID on October 13, 2014. The first home office start-up team member arrived in Bangkok on October 20 and was soon joined by two others on November 3 and 9, 2014. EDC's President and Vice President of the International Development Division also visited Bangkok in early November to ensure that the mobilization and start-up activities were on track and met with USAID officials during their visit as well as local partner Institute for Population and Social Research (IPSR) at Mahidol University.

In the initial few weeks, priority was placed on conducting market research and carrying out consultations with real estate agents to determine how to integrate the new staff into EDC's Bangkok office. It was decided that a larger office space would be necessary over the longer term and EDC initiated a competitive procurement process to identify office space to meet the new requirements. After reviewing office locations, cost per square meter and functionality of space, EDC elected to expand its original office to include space for the entire COMET project. The expansion of the existing office was the most cost effective option. A contract was signed on December 4, 2014, and work began on the renovation and expansion of the office and a plan was developed to allow staff to continue working throughout the renovation process. The renovation and expansion is on schedule and has an estimated completion date of January 19, 2015.

One other key function that started immediately was the process of identifying and hiring the project staff. Job descriptions were finalized in the first week of the project and advertisements placed in leading newspapers and key online sites. Efforts focused on identifying and/or mobilizing staff for the following positions:

- Chief of Party
- Deputy Chief of Party – Operations
- Deputy Chief of Party – Programs
- Finance Officer
- Monitoring and Evaluation Manager

- Administrative and Finance Assistant
- Communications Officer

All of the above mentioned staff with the exception of the Communications Officer were hired during this quarter. It should be noted that EDC originally anticipated the need for an ICT, Communications and Portal Manager, a position with a heavy focus on technology. However, after a review of the project requirements, the position description was redirected to concentrate more on communications and the title of the position revised to Communications Officer. The search for a Communications Officer continues.

During the start-up period, work began on developing the policies and procedures manual for the COMET Project. The document is developed by most members of the start-up taskforce and in coordination with the field team will be completed early in the next quarter. A draft of the policies and procedures manual is almost completed and the process of finalization will start soon.

6. LESSONS LEARNED

NOT APPLICABLE - THIS IS THE PROJECT'S FIRST QUARTERLY REPORT SUBMISSION

7. PLANNED ACTIVITIES FOR NEXT QUARTER INCLUDING UPCOMING EVENTS

Website and social media sites to promote COMET and provide greater access to its resources developed with the following anticipated timeline:

- March 2015, and continuing through the rest of the quarter: Post daily tweet on project twitter feed;
- March 2015: Take over Lower Mekong Facebook account;
- March to May 2015: Revise page name and page content to transition to COMET focus
- March 2015, and continuing through the rest of the quarter, post daily updates to Facebook page

Project Website and Portal

- January to February 2015: Prepare initial website design with M&E data collection
- EDC 's Chief Technology Officer will visit Bangkok at the end of January to carry out in-depth discussions with Bangkok staff, USAID and others who can inform the design and implementation plan for the COMET online presence (social media, website and portal).

Technology Pilot Initiative:

Anticipated Timeframe	Activity
January 2015	Design COMET Instructor Training Pilot, develop instructional and learning materials, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Master Trainer Guide • Instructor Facilitator's Guide • Student Handbook
January 2015	Select university partner and begin recruitment of teacher and student participants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete teacher nomination forms • Interview students for simulation activities
February 2015	Select business partner(s) and begin recruitment of employee participants
February 2015	Organize logistics including but not limited to catering, venue, technology setup
February 2015	Communicate messaging about COMET Instructor Training Pilot on social media and other outlets
February 2015	Prepare students and participating businesses for simulation activities
March 16, 2015	Announce Pilot at EDC-hosted event in Waltham, MA, USA
End of March 2015	Conduct COMET Instructor Training Pilot
April-May, 2015	Provide follow-up support including instructor mentoring, additional post-training online learning and information for students, and ongoing linkage activities for the host institution and participating businesses

The COMET team anticipates USAID presence during the Pilot at the end of March, with details to follow in coordination with USAID. In addition, on March 16, 2015, COMET anticipates hosting an event at the EDC office in Waltham, MA to announce the pilot and to engage stakeholders internally and with external partners, such as Google.

8. COMMUNICATIONS

The United States Government has placed a high priority on leveraging COMET's successes to strengthen the LM sub-region's role in the ASEAN Economic Community. Therefore, a strong project communications function is critical to promoting project innovations and making a diverse set of audiences aware of the project's success.

The first priority for the new quarter will be to hire a Communications Officer. With COMET's heavy emphasis on web-based and online technologies, the communication function needs a contemporary communicator knowledgeable and experienced with social media and web-based communications. COMET's search has narrowed to a short-list of candidates that fit these criteria. The project expects to fill the position by the first part of the next quarter.

As part of the web and portal design and implementation strategy, COMET will integrate communication techniques and marketing tactics to engage users and help drive them from COMET's social media sites to the website and ultimately the workforce portal. The communication function will lead the posting of updated information and content on COMET's online sites, and track usage and effectiveness of online site design and content.

In addition to the standard communication products such as project highlights, success stories and news releases, COMET communications will seek out the backstories on project impact, present and share them in creative and engaging ways using a variety of media in order to reach the widest audience possible.

9. HOW IMPLEMENTING PARTNER HAS ADDRESSED A/COR COMMENTS FROM THE LAST QUARTERLY OR SEMI-ANNUAL REPORT

NOT APPLICABLE - THIS IS THE PROJECT'S FIRST QUARTERLY REPORT SUBMISSION

ANNEX A: PROGRESS SUMMARY

NOT APPLICABLE - THIS IS THE PROJECT'S FIRST QUARTERLY REPORT SUBMISSION

ANNEX B. BLENDED LEARNING PILOT

COMET Project Background

The goal of the USAID-sponsored 'Connecting the Mekong through Education and Training' (COMET) project is to improve the workforce skills of current and future generations living in the Lower Mekong countries (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam), focusing specifically on science, technology, engineering, mathematics, accounting, and tourism (STEM+AT). In so doing, COMET will increase global competitiveness and economic integration of the Lower Mekong sub-region. COMET will achieve this by enhancing the capacity of educational institutions to deliver STEM+AT curricula that close the gap between what skills are taught and what skills are actually required to effectively carry out STEM+AT jobs, and by leveraging technology in connecting instructors, learners and employers."

COMET will bring together public and private sector partners and use information technology to deliver accessible training in key sectors. Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC) is the lead implementing partner of COMET and will work in close collaboration with key partners including Google, Hewlett-Packard (HP), and a premier US-based STEM institution.

COMET Instructor Training Pilot

In early March 2015, COMET will engage from 10-15 instructors and up to 20 students to conduct a four-day training pilot initiative using technology tools that will serve as a model for future COMET training activities. The pilot will cover three days of teacher training and practice and one day of live simulation activities with students and businesses. Following COMET's proposed training methodology, COMET will provide post-training mentoring support for the instructors, additional interactive activities for the students and the business partner, and continuing support for the linkage between the host institution and the collaborating business. This approach effectively models a learning environment that leverages existing online and classroom learning content (i.e., blended learning), appeals to students and teachers, and serves to invigorate private sector involvement in student learning and workforce preparation.

Since this is a pilot activity designed to help assess the viability of COMET's training methodology, a formative evaluation protocol will be conducted in parallel with the implementation of the pilot activities. The evaluation will provide inputs on the effectiveness of

using existing curricula that has been enhanced with blended learning components, the impact of simulations, role plays and other active learning methodologies, the role of instructional partners, the value of the linkage with a local business, and possibilities for scalability and sustainability.

The COMET Instructor Training Pilot will focus on content that cuts across STEM+AT sectors in preparing students for jobs. 21st century work readiness skills such as effective teamwork, communications, and leadership skills will be developed into COMET's early blended-learning modules for higher education teachers to integrate into and supplement existing curricula including selections from HP Life and Work Ready Now!

Additional modules covering both 21st century work readiness skills and STEM+AT technical skills will be developed after the pilot and will be informed by the four-day teaching and learning experience. All COMET modules will engage students through interactive face-to-face learning, including discussions and group activities, and virtual learning through online courses and technology simulations. One potential module to be developed for the pilot is Effective Leadership, which is described in detailed below. COMET will then look to build on the initial four-day pilot with longer-term activities such as ongoing mentoring of instructors, work-based learning, and continuing collaboration with the collaborating business.

Multi-Stakeholder Partnership

EDC will facilitate the COMET Instructor Training Pilot with technical assistance from Google. The instructional design of the pilot will be a joint-collaboration between EDC's curriculum development team and an experienced teacher or trainer familiar with Google Apps for Education, active learning pedagogy, and development of teaching and learning materials.

A suitable partner university focused on STEM+AT in or around Bangkok will be identified to host the pilot training, recruit 10-15 instructors and 10-20 student participants, and coordinate closely with EDC and key stakeholders to organize the pilot training.

Business partner(s) from identified key sectors will be invited to actively participate in the COMET Teacher Training Pilot from design to implementation. The pilot will become a test-case for COMET's tri-partnership approach that links employers, education institutions, and students in a best-practice model that will be scaled during the life of the COMET project.

Timeframe

Anticipated Timeframe	Activity
January 2015	Design COMET Instructor Training Pilot, develop instructional and learning materials, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Master Trainer Guide

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructor Facilitator's Guide • Student Handbook
January 2015	Select university partner and begin recruitment of teacher and student participants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete teacher nomination forms • Interview students for simulation activities
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April-May, 2015	Provide follow-up support including instructor mentoring, additional post-training online learning and information for students, and ongoing linkage activities for the host institution and participating businesses

Potential COMET Module for Pilot – Effective Leadership

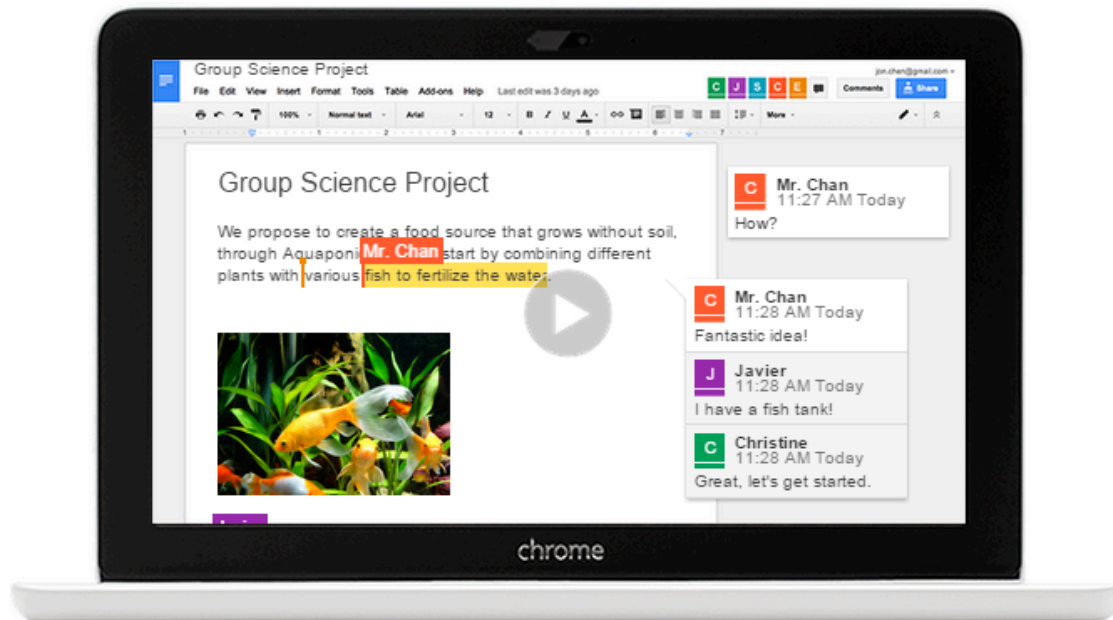
The COMET Curriculum will be structured and delivered around identified skill gaps, of both technical- and 21st century- skills, gathered from a regional baseline study in the Lower Mekong project countries. Selections of existing content from HP Life and WRN! will be blended with active learning methodologies using technology-based applications from the Google suite of online applications such as Google Hangout, Google Docs, Google Classroom, and others. Devices such as Chromebooks or tablets will be used for the final student-employer simulation linking the training to the real world of work.

Below is one potential module that will be developed for the pilot on Effective Leadership, which demonstrates COMET's blended-learning and tri-partnership approach with employers,

schools, and students that integrates both online and classroom activities through the use of technology.

1

Google Apps for Education



EDC will work closely with Google to explore how the COMET Curriculum can utilize and be enhanced by Google's Apps for Education. One option is to use Google Classroom to manage and administer all training content used during the COMET Teacher Training Pilot. For example, the Teacher Facilitator's guide can be uploaded to Google Drive, assignments in the Student Handbook can be given through Google Classroom, and module activities can be accessed by students through Google Docs.

For the Effective Leadership module, the first assignment for students will be to complete the Effective Leadership course on HP LIFE e-Learning. A direct URL link to HP LIFE e-Learning will be accessible in the Student Handbook, which will be viewable through Google Docs.

2

HP LIFE E-Learning



HP LIFE e-Learning
Online training for entrepreneurs

In this first activity, students will complete the self-paced course on Effective Leadership in HP LIFE e-Learning where they will learn how to assess which leadership approaches are appropriate for different situations and how to use desktop or mobile software to collaborate and communicate more productively as a

leader. Through the online course, students will learn and begin to use technologies to help them as future leaders to connect with their employees, partners, and/or customers.

Once students complete the online course, teachers will enhance their e-learning experience by facilitating a classroom group discussion to share experiences and build more in-depth knowledge.

3

Work Ready Now!



Building on the Effective Leadership course from HP LIFE e-Learning, teachers will then facilitate a series of in-class activities from EDC's Work Ready Now! curriculum that will guide learners to identify qualities of an effective leader and realize that all people can have the qualities of a good leader.

Instructors will start this next classroom activity by posing the following question to students: "Who are the inspiring leaders in your community?" After identifying a few examples of leaders, the instructor will then ask students to describe some of the characteristics and qualities of those leaders.

Students will then get out of their seats for a "Safari Walk" around the classroom where the instructor will have pictures of different leaders posted on the walls around the room. The instructor will then ask students to write the qualities/characteristics beneath each leader and after some time regroup the students for group discussion and role plays where students will act out some of the leadership qualities discussed.

4

Live Simulation with Employers

The final classroom activity of the Effective Leadership module will present a real life workplace scenario that students will read in their Student Handbook from Google Docs. The goal of this activity is to involve businesses dynamically in classroom learning, bringing current and market-relevant knowledge, skills, and challenges from the real workplace.

The workplace scenario in the Effective Leadership module has the student play the role of a company manager that has to reach his or her team urgently to respond to an emergency situation that has just occurred in the workplace. Using Google Hangout, a selected student from the class will then carry out this interactive role play with employer volunteers in real-time using Chromebooks or tablets. For the COMET Teacher Training Pilot, EDC will work with key partners to explore how this activity can be designed with a competition-based element that allows “winning” students to take part in the interactive role play and win a prize in addition to the completion certificate that all students will receive.

To complete the module, the teacher will bring all students back together for a final group discussion to reinforce concepts learned through the real workplace challenge and cast of employees. Follow-up activities with instructors, students and the business partner will seek to demonstrate ways to bring such a training unit to scale and make the process sustainable.